ArtBreak

Birth of a Festival

Out of the closet and onto the screen. Colorado Springs comes out with its first gay and lesbian film festival

By Suzanne Becker

No doubt about it. Colorado Springs is in the midst of a cultural transformation. Perhaps even a revolution. And oddly enough, it may have actually begun with Amendment Two.

Whether you were against it or supported it, that insipid little amendment was a huge catalyst for change in Colorado Springs. It made us — collectively — take a good, long look at ourselves.

attend because you are not gay or lesbian would be a big mistake.

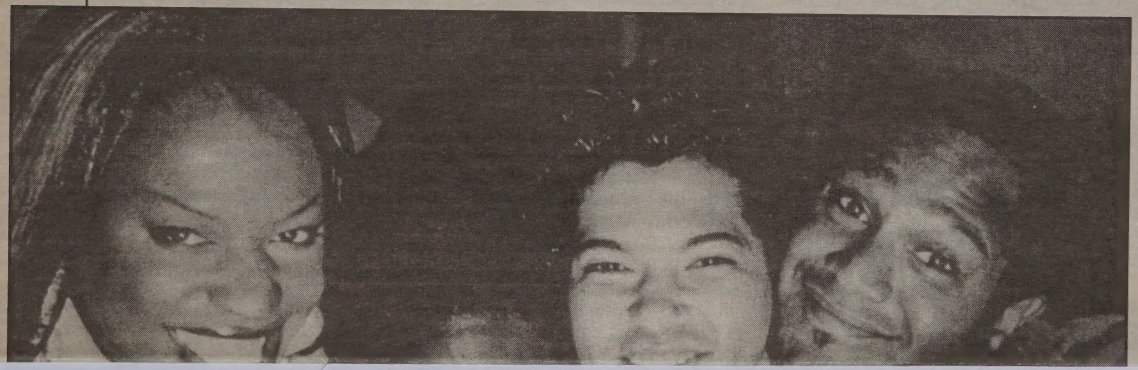
Punk spunk

Friday night's lineup begins with two of the more "mainstream" films, *Punks* and *But I'm a Cheerleader*, both of which, despite receiving national attention, never found their way to the Springs.

Punks, the directorial debut of 27-year-old Patrik-Ian Polk, tackles two big issues: gay and black. The result? A sort of a gay *Waiting to Exhale* with an excellent soundtrack.

entrenched in her own drama with the backup singers from her performing group. And Dante, the youngster in the bunch — a rich kid from Beverly Hills — is cute as any boy toy can be, but on the path to self-destruction via drug and alcohol abuse.

Punks is sexy, energetic, fast-paced, funny and touching, with the slickness, at times, of a music video. The soundtrack, crucial to the narration of the film, runs the gamut from retros like Sister Sledge and Marvin Gaye to more current hit makers like Aimee Mann and Macy Gray.



teenager named Megan. She's smart, pretty, popular, dates the captain of the football team and, above all, she is a cheerleader. Life is pretty hunky-dory for Megan, until her parents (Bud Cort and Mink Stole) stage a group intervention. The evidence is overwhelming that Megan is homosexual: She is a vegetarian, doesn't like kissing her boyfriend, loves Melissa Ethridge and hugs her friends — often.

She is sent off into the surreal world of True Directions, a five-step homo rehab camp designed to deprogram homosexual tendencies. Girls wear hot pink, attend home economics classes, and learn how to meet men, diaper babies and clean house. Boys wear baby blue, play football and fix things. The camp is run by an over-the-top, ultra masculine guy named Mike (played hilariously by RuPaul out of drag).

Though blisteringly funny and cartoon-like at times, *Cheerleader* addresses the heavy-duty topic of gay teens and homophobia. Babbit, who has been identified as part of a "brash new generation of gay filmmakers," handles these issues with humor, insight and honesty, forcing to light the absurdities of our entrenched sexual roles.

Maria Schrader as Felice Schragenheim ("Jaguar") with Juliane Köler as Lilly ("Aimée") in Aimée & Jaguar

tic and exciting, and interspersed among the footage of high-seas action are candid and emotional interviews with each of the crew members, detailing their battle with HIV and the impact which it has had upon their lives.

What I want for Christmas

Switching gears altogether, *24 Nights* is a dark comedy about a 24-year-old college dropout named Jonathan. Jonathan lives with his sister and her husband, works in a bookstore, smokes a lot of pot in his spare time and still believes in Santa Claus — due to an odd but memorable childhood encounter with a Salvation Army Santa.

One day, around Thanksgiving, Jonathan decides to write to Santa asking him for a boyfriend. A week later, on Dec. 1, he meets an innocent Southerner named Toby. Jonathan decides that he has 24 days to figure out whether or not cute and charming Toby is indeed his Christmas present from Santa.

If your sense of humor runs on the darker side, you'll especially appreciate this film. The characters are colorful, well-developed overall and ring true. And this film is refreshing in that it depicts queer life with honesty, on just a regular day-to-day basis without a great deal of drama.

Throughout 1999, this film picked up six various independent film festival awards, including Best American Independent Feature Film at the Cleveland International Film Festival. It's an offbeat and engaging little film, shot low budget, but it should not be overlooked. Even if it's not Christmas.

life as a result. Felice is Jewish, but works undercover as a journalist for a Nazi newspaper in order to pass along information to the Jewish underground.

The two meet by chance at a concert and, through a series of circumstances, eventually enter into an epic romance. Some of the most passionate moments of the film are told through letters the two women pen to each other, under the names of Jaguar (Felice) and Aimée (Lilly).

This is an emotionally charged and riveting story, with an intensity that is underscored by the backdrop of war-torn Berlin and is made more astounding by the fact that this is a true story. Today, Lilly Wust is 87 years old and lives in Germany. The film flashes between past and present, with present-day Lilly narrating. This film holds up with the best of epic romances.

Dark confessions

The last film of the evening, a favorite on the festival circuit for many years, is the film *Lilies*. Set in 1952, *Lilies* is essentially a story of love, betrayal and revenge. The entire story takes place in a prison confessional, where a bishop has been summoned to hear the confession of a certain prisoner.

Narrated by the prisoner, what unfolds is a love story wrought with jealousy and, ultimately, murder. As the prisoner recounts his story and makes his true identity known, the bishop is horrified to recognize his own name in the prisoner's past. The bishop must come to grips with his true feelings and all of his wrongdoings. ❑

Love and war

First Annual Dikes Book